

The Objective Is to Minimize the Maximum Regret

Bonnie Auslander

The caretaker tells us where we can go
and where we must not.
No, those doors stay locked.
He has the keys. We
will never have the keys.
It is unfortunate
that we can sense only the dimmest
of blankets in our assigned compartments
and barely make out
the sinks' wavering pedestals,
but he says in time we will adjust.
After all, the sea too has shelves
on which it sets its many fictions.
Stories of hearths and heroes.
We can't see the sea from here.
Only a distant sound, like scuffling.
He points to where we may walk
on the grass but not on the gravel
path itself, whereas over here
we're allowed to take the path,
but the lawn on either side
must remain untrammelled.
On specified days we may lie
prone under the clouds'
ruffed gloves, but we are never
to look straight at the unbuttoned sun.
Residents have been removed
for less. He promises certain hours
will be ours—for music
made with rubber bands
or, in time, for writing letters

with chalk made from bones
of last year's plankton.
There are worse homes
to come home to.
Above all, he says,
we must remain grateful,
even as our faces age
to the color of water
lightened by artificial tears.

